# FROM IDEA TO IMAGE

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A Supporting Paper
for the Graduate Exhibition

Presented to
the Faculty of the Graduate School
University of Minnesota, Duluth

Under the Direction of
Dr. Arthur E. Smith

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A Requirement for the Degree
Master of Arts in Art

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November, 1973

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## I. INTENTION

This paper is an attempt to trace the evolution of my paintings from their earliest beginnings in the mind and eye through the completed work. The primary purpose is to bring about a greater realization on my part of the creative process as it is involved in my own work. This realization, I would hope, will have a positive effect on my future work as well as giving me a greater insight into the creative problems of my students.

To me, painting seems to be an expression of feelings or emotions done through the medium of paint, by an individual which is characteristic of his personality. To better understand why my paintings have become what they are, I feel it is necessary to go back to my beginnings as a person and as an artist.

## II. BEGINNINGS: PERSONAL BACKGROUND

My life began in 1933 on a share crop farm in Northwestern Minnesota. It was a time when nearly everyone in that farm community was poor as were my parents, but over the succeeding years they worked hard to raise their status. Naturally, in this type of environment there was rarely any mention or reference to the world of art. In fact, there was really very little contact with the outside world except through newspapers, radio, or an occasional book or magazine. Virtually no one traveled any distance except possibly during emergencies.

Some of my earliest recollections of childhood are of my drawing animals, birds, trees and other things from my surroundings. My mother had some interest in drawing and she, having a background of rural elementary teaching, gave me encouragement in the development of my abilities.

Although our farm was on the edge of the Red River Valley and the land was quite flat, we had quite an extensive wood lot near our home. It was in these woods that I spent many of my boyhood hours, developing a strong interest in nature and woodcraft.

As I stated, most of the land in the area was (and still is) quite flat and open. One had a strong feeling of space and was more conscious of the horizon in this area than in others. The land was divided grid fashion by roads nearly every mile lending a feeling of geometric order to the farms.

The elementary school I attended had no art program other than the usual pencil and crayon drawings which decorated the room for seasonal changes, president's birthdays or other holidays. I don't think there was a very good ditto machine in our school because I don't recall a great many of the coloring sheets - ala coloring books.

Since my mother had taught me basic reading before I began school, I was able to read most of the available books in a short time, and since the teachers didn't know what else to do with me, I was usually allowed to spend my time drawing. This plus the fact that many of my fellow students seemed impressed by my drawings probably spurred me on.

The epitome of my years in junior high was the winning of an honorable mention in the State Easter Seal poster contest when I was in eighth grade. It was quite a thrill for a young boy to have his name printed in the Twin Cities newspapers almost three hundred miles away.

Later when I entered the senior high school, which also had no art program, I was encouraged by my teachers to work on art related activities. Sometimes the relation to art was quite remote! Especially so at times in the making of signs and posters.

Naturally during my years in high school my thoughts turned toward career possibilities. Although my father had had only an eighth grade education, with no possibilities of going to high school, he felt that a good education was vital. That my parents followed through on this is evidenced by the fact that my sister is also an art teacher and my brother a design engineer.

Although my father was proud of my art work, I feel he had a negative attitude toward art as a career possibility because of the difficulty of earning a living at it. This was extremely important to one who had struggled through the "Depression."

My mother had a teacher training and rural school teaching background and an idealistic viewpoint. She seemed to possess a more positive attitude toward art through all my growing years, and partly because I had little contact with art in high school, talked my father into my enrolling in a correspondence course in commercial art. This probably was acceptable to him--it was art in a more practical aspect. I never did finish the course.

When I entered college, I thought that architecture or possibly engineering of some type would be my field since I had done well in mathematics and science in high school along with development of my art interests on my own. My parents were paying my way through school, and since I wanted to please them, I felt these fields were economically more feasible than being an artist of any type. At any rate the construction of buildings had always fascinated me so architecture really wasn't a poor second choice.

After a year of college and several art courses, I decided that an art career of some kind was what I really wanted. (My parents concurred with this decision, thinking of me becoming an art teacher or commercial artist.)

Upon completion of college I was drafted into the U.S. Army where I served as a draftsman and artist. This service gave me an opportunity to widen my horizons as I traveled from coast to coast and visited art museums such as the National Gallery of Art, Freer Gallery, Art Institute of Chicago and many others.

While I was in Kentucky I attended the Art Center Association School for a year and a half. This was an important experience for me as most of the instructors had Eastern United States and foreign educational backgrounds.

When I regained my freedom from the Army, I decided to try the commercial art route. I really didn't think I wanted to be a teacher. I worked two years as an illustrator for an interior design firm, and then for two years I, with a partner, operated a design studio in which we did architectural, interior design and graphics.

In 1962 I decided I'd had enough of the city and commercial art life and felt that teaching was an avenue that I should explore. I obtained a position teaching art in high school and moved from the city to the small town. While involved in teaching and during summer breaks I experimented with painting in various media and by 1965 I felt the need to learn more about painting. Painting workshops were being offered each summer at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, and I enrolled in its graduate school.

Not long after this I became seriously interested in working with watercolor. I already had some familiarity with it through commercial work and found it a convenient media for me, as it allowed speed of execution in a limited amount of time. Thus it was possible for me to paint even if I only had an hour to spare.

Along with these developments I had some sale successes in the Twin City suburban area and had won a prize in a small competition; all of which served as incentives to keep progressing.

## III. BEGINNINGS: BACKGROUND OF MY PAINTINGS

The ideas in this section are posed as questions the answers to which may pose other questions; all of which may not have definite answers.

Where does a painting come from? It seems impossible to me to know the complete answer but I think Picasso came as close as anyone--

> "A picture comes to me from far off, who knows how far, I devined it, I saw it, I made it, and yet next day I myself don't see what I have done. How can one penetrate my dreams, my instincts, my desires, my thoughts, which have taken a long time to elaborate themselves and bring themselves to the light." (Ghiselin, 1955)

How much time does it take to make a watercolor painting? This question is one most commonly asked of me by students and laymen but is often irrelevant to the quality of a watercolor painting. I feel it is irrelevant in the context in which it is asked because it relates only to the physical act of painting, not to the mental or emotional or thought processes.

In a larger sense, the question has caused me to wonder when does a painting actually begin? Obviously it is a more complicated process than merely applying paint to a support, and I have discussed this process under the question of "When Do I Paint?"

Why do I paint? Because I enjoy it. Why do I enjoy it? Because of the feeling of fulfillment if I at least partially succeed in expressing a feeling or idea that I was trying to communicate.

To echo Rex Brandt, California watercolorist, "...my paintings are for me a rejoicing in life and are my way to hold and share every moment." (Brandt, 1972)

In this sharing I feel that one of the greatest satisfactions I have is to watch someone seeing familiar things in a new light. As one viewer put it, "I didn't think I would ever find myself enjoying a painting of weeds on a hillside."

Another aspect of why I paint is one common to most of us--approval from my fellow man. This approval serves as an incentive to further work through the stimulation of confidence in my abilities and this comes in a variety of ways. Most easily it comes through compliments from the public and other artists, some of it sincere and a great deal of it superficial. Some of this helps to temper the negative criticism when it comes. In a more tangible way, sales of my works

show me that some people care about what I paint and also makes it possible for me to buy the best of materials with which to work.

Of course, the winning of prizes in competitions is probably the greatest ego-builder of all, but in turn it could be as dangerous to an artist as it could be to others. In other words, I don't want to be caught in a situation where I'm painting to earn compliments, sell paintings, or win prizes. These are secondary to my fist concern of communication of feelings and will follow as natural by-products if I am successful at doing that.

Why do I paint what I paint? Generally I paint landscapes, nature-oriented subjects and aged buildings with the obvious reason that I have been familiar with the outdoors and nature since childhood, so I feel that I relate to this type of subject matter best. Moreover, I seem to almost unconsciously find those lines, shapes, forms and colors that appeal to me most easily in nature. This is not meant to imply that I paint only what I see in nature, but that it serves as the springboard for my work. I find this statement, attributed to Georges Rouault best sums up why I paint what I do:

> "In truth, I have painted by opening my eyes day and night on the perceptible world and also by closing them from time to time that I might better see the vision blossom and submit itself to orderly arrangement." (Giselin, 1955)

When do I paint? When I have a conscious response to a particular feeling or idea. When something "clicks" mentally and when I deeply desire to paint a particular subject. Since I usually paint landscapes, most of my stimuli are of a visual variety such as reef, water or rock when I am near large lakes, or it might well be weather phenomena such as rain, snow, wind, fog or sunlight. Then again it

might be a change of season with the attendant changes of color of the land. Or it might be when I see a familiar place in a different perspective while driving, bicycling or walking.

My conscious response might also be stimulated by things related to landscape that I have experienced by means of rough sketches, written notes and/or photos that I have taken. I often keep a number of objects in my studio that I have collected such as leaves, rocks, flowers, bark, moss, branches, shells, feathers, etc. Often if I study items such as moss or lichen-covered rock I can visualize things such as a forest or even a lake storm in a piece of gnarled wood. This type of activity can help "get me out of a rut" when I feel bored with my painting.

My conscious response to some of these stimuli does not always result in a painting immediately. Sometimes it might be days or weeks later before a painting comes of the experience. At other times I may not find it possible to paint since I may not have gained a clear conception of what it was I wished to put down on paper.

## IV. INFLUENCES

In this section I will point out the influence other artists have had on my painting. Among these are two men, Morris Kantor and Ben Cunningham, who were instructors of painting workshops held at the University of Minnesota, Duluth.

Morris Kantor, although his style and content are a great deal different from mine, helped me "loosen up" my way of working. During that workshop he encouraged me to do a series of oil paintings making use of loose free washes and to respond to some of the accidental

effects created by them. This experience was of great value to my work as it was later in that year that I began to work in a much looser fashion with my watercolors which had previously been quite tightly drawn.

The other instructor of painting workshop, Ben Cunningham, gave me valuable insights into the use of color in painting as well as providing motivation for me to continue learning about it on my own.

As he described it, there are three main types of color use in painting: volume color, surface color and film color. Volume color is the use of color to create a feeling of atmospheric perspective by graying or cooling of the hues in the distant parts of the painting. It is as if objects are seen through a translucent film. Surface color is local color or color as it actually appears at close range without anything between it and the viewer. Film color is transparent color or one color seen through another. Fog, mist or water might be film color in a landscape, but in a larger sense, Mr. Cunningham created his paintings by superimposing planes of seemingly transparent color over one another thus creating other colors and dramatic impact at the critical place.

I have endeavored to apply the concept of film color to my landscape paintings at various times. Loose applications of washes in contrasting colors are superimposed over one another and then other shapes are brought out in them by use of ink line work.

Mr. Cunningham also gave me encouragement when I felt a bit uncertain about some subject matter for a painting by stating, "I don't care what you paint as long as you paint with love."

Mr. Ed Leak, life drawing instructor at the Art Center Association School, Louisville, Kentucky, was quite influential in developing my drawing ability, especially in the use of line to delineate three-dimensional form.

Dr. Russell Sawdey, instructor at Bemidji State College, who works in watercolor himself, has helped me with encouragement and advice on painting during critical points in my development.

Other artists whose influence I have felt through reading and viewing exhibits and reproductions are William Thon and Andrew Wyeth. There are numbers of reasons why Thon's work has appeal for me, among them being the abstracted, but recognizable nature subjects. He also plays depth in the picture plane against flat pattern and sometimes he uses light itself as a compositional element. His use of a high horizon or viewpoint in landscapes and the spontaneous quality of his paintings have also been facets of his work that I have studied. This last quality probably being a derivation from Japanese prints which have influenced a good many landscape artists.

Andrew Wyeth's work has also affected my composition and viewpoint. Although widely known for his tempera paintings, I find his watercolors, which although they appear very realistic, actually have a certain looseness of handling, especially when seen in the original. More than that, his compositions have a strong design quality underlying the realism.

Naturally there are numbers of other artists who have influenced what I do in watercolor, such as Winslow Homer, Thomas Eakins and John Marin. These artists were among the painters who helped make watercolor in America a major vehicle of artistic expression. (Gardner, 1966)

Even Piet Mondrian whose abstractions are far removed from water-color landscape has influenced my sense of composition so that through the use of proportional division and lines of continuation, I try to build an abstract pattern underlying the representational objects.

Another strong influence on my paintings is my own environment, that is the area in which I now live and have lived in at various times in the past. This is a rural setting with small towns, woods and lakes. I grew up on a farm and I feel more at ease in this kind of setting than in a city. In fact, when I lived in metropolitan areas I felt myself unable to paint landscapes effectively and worked more in an abstract form.

Another facet of my environment is the people around me, that is my family, relatives and friends. Most of them have come to accept my need to work, so that when they come to visit they don't expect me to stop painting. My wife also is a great help to me, not only with understanding and support, but also by taking care of the bookkeeping and correspondence associated with sales and shows. Then too, my children have come to enjoy art related activities and, therefore, it is easier for me to concentrate on my work.

One other area of my environment that I find important is the working area or studio that I had built in my home. It makes it possible for me to leave materials and equipment in convenient places instead of always picking them up and putting them away. Books, magazines, sketches, reproductions and other items are where they can be easily seen and used.

## V. PREPARATIONS

When I am in the midst of a painting "binge" it seems obvious and wonderful to me that one watercolor can "grow" from another. However, when I'm not involved in one of these spurts of painting, I sometimes wonder if I will ever have any new ideas at all. It is at times like these that I become preoccupied with what I call idea-gathering. I do this in a number of ways: reading books on art, making sketches, taking photos or simply going fishing. It is so difficult for me to say where a painting begins in my thought process that I wish to be ready to work on a moments' notice. For this reason I also often engage in what might be called "energy charging" while not painting. This simply involves getting rid of exterior distractions such as some domestic chore that I've put off doing that might be nagging at my consciousness. Then when the impulse strikes I feel free to paint.

At this point I would like to explore in more detail two of the main areas of my preparation for painting which I will call idea-gathering and "psyching up."

I think as far as specific ideas are concerned, some of my best paintings have been based on experiences rather than specific locations. Sometimes I think that my watercolors are too location oriented, that is, I feel that I have concentrated too much on reproducing a particular scene rather than trying to capture the spirit of it in simpler terms.

Therefore, I find that my best work is done in the studio where I can more easily eliminate extraneous detail. In order to facilitate my studio work, I sketch on 4" X 6" index cards with a broad

pencil or felt pen. These sketches sometimes are done in rough fashion on location or they might be done from projected slides or black and white photos. At any rate, I sketch to the point where I feel I have obtained the gist of the subject and then work on designing the idea without further reference to the original source so I am not tempted to put in more than I need.

After my sketches are refined somewhat from the rough versions, I usually place them in my studio where I can study them at any time and possibly make changes in them until I reach a point where I feel I would like to try a painting based on a particular sketch. Sometimes a sketch might lie around a long time before I feel like painting from it and at other times I may throw it away or pursue a different version.

"Ideas," writes Norman Colquhoun, in his book, Painting: A Creative Approach, "are by no means the antithesis of action; on the contrary they are the mainspring of action." (Colquhoun, 1969)

If I haven't painted for a period of several weeks, I usually find it difficult to get actively painting again. I seem to feel a loss of confidence. I then try very hard to "psych" myself up for painting similar to what an athlete might do before a big game. After my sketching preparations or simply having a strong experience, I work at convincing myself that there is nothing I want to do more at that moment than to paint that particular subject. To do this I try to get rid of all outside worries, duties, or commitments that I know must be eliminated before I can feel free for the concentration which seems to be vital to the success of a watercolor. Other devices which I use in an attempt to free or relax myself are the playing of music

that I enjoy, making first paintings on the back of paintings that have "flopped", or I may simply paint smaller at first in an attempt to feel my way before I commit myself to using a large sheet of expensive paper. When I reach the point where I know what I want to paint, how I'm going to approach it, and am enthusiastic and anxious to get on with it, then all I need are the materials.

## VI. PAINT TO PAPER

When I first began to paint I was more concerned with technique than content. Although I am still concerned with technique it has become more of a means to an end rather than an end in itself as it once was.

Since spontaneity is such a valued concept in watercolor it is necessary to paint a great deal so as to arrive at a point where one can almost forget about or become unconscious of technique. When an artist gains confidence in his ability to handle the technical end of watercolor painting, his mind is then free to concentrate on expression of feeling.

As one views the masterpieces of the great English watercolorist, Turner, it is well to remember that he produced somewhere around 19,400 watercolors to make them possible. (Brandt, 1973)

When working in watercolor, one of the most important elements is the white paper itself, for with the loss of the white paper the painting dies. White has a tendency to irradiate or come forward in the picture plane and darker washes tend to fall back. Therefore, at the beginning of a painting, I plan to leave much of the paper white or practically untouched. This works out quite well because it is

usually possible to add color later since it is much more difficult to regain white once the color has set.

Oftentimes at the beginning of a watercolor I wet the paper completely with more than the usual amount of water. I may actually have water standing on the surface of the paper. Most of this is poured or drained off, however, in the early part of the painting.

I make no drawing on the paper preliminary to applying the paint. Since I have already spent time making the preparations I discussed earlier, the idea is clear in my mind and I can dispense with the inhibiting effects of pencil lines on the paper and the painting can evolve more naturally.

After wetting the paper, I apply rich strong color with a large brush to outline a main part of the composition. Most of the time I use a Japanese hake brush 2" to 4" wide for this purpose. I also have at hand sponges, tissues and razor blades which are excellent aids in removing unwanted color from the paper.

The large amount of water which I have on the paper at the beginning allows me more time to decide how I wish to have various parts of the painting relate to the whole. With the paper tacked to a board, it can be picked up and tilted in various degrees to make the washes flow in desired ways. Also the slower drying caused by the initially large amount of water, allows greater flexibility in removing color or moving it about.

Speed of execution in watercolor is usually much more essential than in oil painting. One must keep ahead of the drying of the paper while the main portion of the painting is being done. In some ways

this could be considered a disadvantage, but to a large extent it also promotes a more spontaneous result. Since some of the finishing work on the painting is done on the dry paper I must take care to work with quick spontaneous strokes while I add sharp crisp lines and stronger color areas.

Generally, I work for contrast between washes of color with fuzzy edges and more clearly defined lines made with a brush and quill pen and india ink. At various times I also use ink line or spatter integrated into the wet paint so that some fusion takes place. Color is often thrown or spattered onto the paper contributing to textures which cannot be painted but must grow or happen. Sometimes this type of color application can create accidental forms which, if one allows himself to be influenced, can stimulate the imagination.

The accident, either the so-called "happy" one or the less fortunate one, can play an important part in a watercolor because complete control during the development of a painting is seldom possible. Some painters regard this as a defect while others see accidents as clues to more flexible techniques which reflect the true and spontaneous nature of watercolor.

That the accident has been of importance in the development of watercolor is evidenced by Alexander Cozens, (Chomicky, 1968) 18th century English artist, who developed the idea of using what he called "blots" as the basis of greater originality in his watercolor work. The use of these accidental-type spots as a starting point for a composition marked the beginning of spontaneous quality as a dimension of the watercolor method.

William Turner (Chomicky, 1968) went much farther than Cozens in the use of accidental approaches to the genesis of a painting. Not only was he open to the use of things such as "blots," he would sometimes employ children to daub his painting surface and he would finish the painting after stopping them at the right moment.

Most of my watercolors make use of a combination of the three basic watercolor techniques: wet-in-wet, wash or control method and dry brush and line. Many times I use all three almost simultaneously. At this point I wish to cite actual applications of these techniques in paintings which were included in my graduate show.

Wet-in-wet is the technique that I enjoy the most and involves the application of relatively thick pigment applied while the paper is quite wet so that the paint is thinned by the water already on the paper. It is the freest and most spontaneous of the three techniques and the one which must be executed most quickly. The best examples of this technique in my work are paintings shown in illustrations 2, 10, 12, 17, 18 and 19. The unpredictability of it is charming but control is difficult and shapes are sometimes too vague.

Most of the time I apply the pigment wet-on-wet with a brush, but occasionally I will use pieces of matboard which have been covered with the pigment to stamp or print shapes into the composition. The painting in illustration 25 shows that this approach can contribute a more abstract geometrical quality.

Sometimes while a wet-in-wet application of pigment is beginning to set, I will pull out color to indicate lighter valued shapes within the area. This may be done with a razor blade, paper towel, or a piece of blotting paper. The paintings in illustrations 2, 7, 10, 12,

15 and 21 contain shapes created in this manner.

Often I will also introduce india ink into the wet color to create textural effects. The ink has a tendency to break up or disintegrate and spread through the color creating interesting results. This texture may be difficult to see completely in the photos included here but some evidence of it can be seen in illustrations 6, 11, 12 and 18.

The wash or control method which is paint applied rather thinly (larger proportion of water to pigment) to dry or slightly damp paper is probably the most positive means of indicating shape for it usually involves more clear cut edges. Of the paintings in my show, this technique is probably most evident in illustrations 8 and 9. The washes in these two paintings were used to bring out negative white shapes as well as indicate some darker positive ones. Wash shapes can be strong because of their simplicity, but they can also become rather monotonous so I sometimes feel the need to add ink line into a wash while still damp, trying to create a soft or fuzzy line quality as in illustrations 12, 17 and 18.

Dry brush and line, the third of the three basic watercolor techniques, can be used to increase textural qualities, but by itself it can be too "glittery." Because of this I usually try to integrate it into a wash such as in the trees and the fence line in illustration 9 and the corn rows and the brush clumps in illustration 8.

At other times I may use ink line more for shape indication such as the rocks and the trees in illustration 20 or the sailboats and other shapes in illustration 15. These lines are quick, descriptive and decorative, but they do not carry far visually.

Another consideration I must make while applying paint to the paper is the kind of shapes I wish to leave there and how they shall be arranged. I see this as a depth versus pattern relationship in which there are tensions created in the painting between indications of linear perspective and an over-all abstract pattern. Strong linear perspective creates a feeling of deep space in the picture plane and seems to destroy pattern and yet landscape needs some feeling of space. Because of these problems I have tended to use spatial perspective more in the manner of the Chinese. They make use of overlapping shapes rather than vanishing points. This helps to retain more of the feeling of pattern.

## VII. COMPLETION

When the time comes in the painting process where I begin to realize that the painting is nearing completion, I find that I'm most successful if I do more looking and thinking than actual painting. It happens so often that I have gone too far before I realize I've overdone it. I'm beginning to be more aware of the critical nature of this point in the painting.

A device that I usually use to give the wet painting a more completed look is a working mat which helps me to better judge the paintings' final appearance. Then, too, I will also put the painting in a temporary frame and hang it on a wall so that I can study it at my leisure for a time before I decide that is completed. My wife often participates in this process by acting as a critic and making suggestions usually from a more objective viewpoint than mine because she wasn't involved in the creation of the painting. She has learned

not to worry about hurting my feelings.

When I am satisfied that a painting is completed, I will make a photographic transparency of it. A slide catalog of most of my work is quite valuable to me. I can review these slides at various intervals to gain insights into my progress. Since I also record the name of the purchaser on the slide picture, I have a location record of paintings I have sold.

The final step toward completion is framing and matting the watercolor. Most of my paintings are framed quite simply by using a raw oak frame stained with a wash of black acrylic to give a neutral emphasis to the wood grain. This type of frame, I believe, complements a watercolor landscape painting.

The first exhibitions of one's completed works can sometimes be traumatic experiences, but seems to become less so with experience. One of the main advantages that I see in exhibiting my work is that I become more conscious of what I'm trying to achieve. Also, there is a certain amount of prestige associated with exhibiting in one-man or in group shows at colleges, galleries and private institutions that seems to help my feeling of confidence as I approach new painting problems.

To this end, I have participated in community, state and regional competitions. With the additional goal of sales of my work, I also exhibit my work in a number of higher quality art fairs and festivals where one can also visit with other artists. This not only is more fun than hanging up paintings and leaving them in a show for a period of time, but it is more stimulating because of the interchange of ideas which takes place among artists exhibiting in a fair.

## VIII. REFLECTIONS ON CONTENT AND MEANING

At times when the paint stops flowing and the bustle of preparing for a show is past and I have time to pause and reflect on what I have done, the question returns--what am I trying to say? Does my painting have any meaning beyond the visual content? I may never be able to answer these questions to my satisfaction because my intentions seem to have a way of changing over various periods of time.

Sometimes I get caught up in the physical act of painting to the extent that I neglect the more thoughtful part of the process. At this point it becomes more of a subconscious awareness of the meaning that I wish to convey with the visual content.

Then, too, watercolor painters are not usually expected to express much profound meaning in their paintings so far as I've observed. They often seem to be more concerned with visual imagery and effects than any deeper meaning, forgetting in many instances that the expression of feeling is a higher goal than mere surface results. Of course, this is not to say that painters in oil do not suffer at all in this respect, but oil painting as a medium seems to have achieved more esteem, not only in the eyes of the public, but among many artists and critics as well. The attitude often seems to be that important paintings are done in oil, not watercolor.

How-to-do-it-books on watercolor, so popular at present, probably contribute to the feeling of shallowness of painting in watercolor since they display so much emphasis on technique. This causes imitation to be quite dominant. The derivative styles of much watercolor painting can be seen in some of the national watercolor shows in which

the prize winning paintings often look as if they might have been done by the same artist.

I think some of the differences generally evident in comparison of oil and watercolor, as far as content and meaning are concerned, can be attributed to inherent differences in the nature of the mediums. Oil paint has the general characteristic of being a more slow, deliberate medium in which it is possible to achieve more exact nuances of meaning through its quality of being more easily changed. Watercolor, on the other hand, is more spontaneous, more oriented toward the accidental effect and because of the difficulty of making changes or corrections, therefore, more difficult to control. Because of these characteristics I consider it more natural for watercolor painters to be more technique conscious and for the medium to be considered less capable of conveying profound thought and meaning.

As the content of painting has been reduced by many painters in modern times with the objective of emphasizing meaning--the paint itself has become the content in much painting. (Shahn, 1957)

Even a painter in the realist style such as Andrew Wyeth gives some evidence of his consciousness of this by the free manner in which his paint is initially applied. Yar Chomicky points this out in discussing a watercolor painting by Wyeth entitled, Benjamin's House. He states: "It is pure brushwork. Any stroke taken out of context would lose its meaning. What appears to be a branch, for instance, would revert to a fine flick of a line." (Chomicky, 1968)

This consciousness of seeing the paint as paint, even in a representational painting, has led me to use drips and spatter to create feelings of texture and detail in passages of my paintings.

The reduction of the content of painting to the paint itself led eventually to some of the minimal types of artistic expression such as Malevitch's canvas, White on White. (Shahn, 1957)

I find it difficult for me to imagine watercolor painting going in this direction--it is possible but highly unlikely since I think most watercolor painters are too involved with visual imagery as their content to move far in this direction. Certainly John Marin's work in watercolor was a move in this direction. He once compared his painting to a golf game--the fewer the strokes, the better, but the visual imagery was still there in shorthand. (Time-Life,1970)

In my own work some of the ideas that guide me are much like those stated by Glen Bradshaw, a prominent watercolor painter:

> "Art requires order; the artist's work should reflect his uniqueness; the artist should know and respect the craft of painting; and a painting should be a rewarding visual experience for the viewer." (Reep, 1969)

To me the order expressed in a painting is a reflection of the order of nature; a minute echo of the order of the universe. Nature presents such a profusion of visual images that the artist has many decisions to make in presenting his expression of its order. The way in which he does this reflects the artist's uniqueness. Images which the artist uses in his work usually take on a symbolic significance for him. For years I've been emphasizing islands in many of my lake country paintings along with boats and all the associated paraphenalia. Slowly, I've become aware that the concept of islands represent escape from my everyday surroundings and, of course, boats also represent freedom from the land-locked life and travel to island places.

In many of my compositions lines or planes often occur which may be interpreted as representing the horizon or great distance. As I mentioned in an earlier section of this paper, I grew up in an area where I was always aware of space and a distant horizon. I feel this need for a feeling of space shows in my work today. Another concept which has influenced my painting is the direction North. Since my boyhood it has always represented the northwoods, adventure and the unknown.

Growing up on a farm and spending much of my time outdoors helped reinforce this idea of direction. My rural background has also led to my use of empty houses and buildings as subject matter. To me they symbolize the decline of rural life--these structures are shells of peoples' dreams with nature involved in reclaiming the wildness.

## IX. PROJECTIONS

In looking to the future it is also often useful to cast a backward glance to see where one has been. When taking stock and assessing my present status in terms of where I was and what my aspirations were ten years ago, I find that I really sold myself short. As things have turned out, I have reached a point where most of my spare time has been devoted to painting activities where ten years ago I was doing only an occasional piece. As a result of this tremendous increase in my involvement with the watercolor media, I have exhibited in many one-man shows and now I have as many as I can handle each year.

One of the attendant results of this exposure to the public has been a great surge in sales of my work. Ten years ago I sold several small paintings in a year. Since then I have sold several hundred and have a number in permanent public and private collections. All of these developments have provided stimuli for further work and has helped enhance my feeling of being a producing artist. This, in turn, fostered a more positive self-image helpful to my confidence in the teaching of art.

Having taken a look at the past and discovering that I had no real understanding of what was possible for me to accomplish during intervening years, I realize that with some thought about the directions I hope to move toward, it may be possible to achieve even more growth as a watercolor painter in the future.

To this end I have resolved to attempt moves in new directions in the near future and have also set some long range goals for myself as an artist and teacher. One of the things I hope to try which is new for me are larger works that go beyond the standard 22" X 30" watercolor paper. Hopefully this will enlarge the scope of my watercolor experience--to think and paint in larger dimensions such as might be possible on roll paper, watercolor board, and some of the larger size papers available.

Another direction I hope to explore in the near future are the possibilities presented by acrylic paint and its various mediums. In combination with traditional watercolor, casein paint, pastels and various collage items such as tissue paper, sand, shavings, etc. exciting possibilities for new expressions are presented. Acrylic washes are insoluble when dry so overpainting of washes without dis-

turbing the previous washes underneath is easily accomplished; however, the removal of paint from the surface once it is dry is not very feasible.

Another avenue of interest to me is the use of rice paper as a painting ground. The work of Chen-Chi (Chomicky, 1968) is particularly interesting to me as he has combined Oriental and Occidental influences into a very effective expression. The use of rice paper, as I understand it, can be somewhat disconcerting to a painter accustomed to the traditional wash approach on Western type papers. Calligraphy has naturally evolved as a more dominant means of expression on rice paper because of the apparently greater difficulty of laying washes on the absorbent surface.

Some of the larger long range goals I hope to accomplish over a period of years are to become a more effective teacher, to exhibit in national shows and to realize as much of my potential as an artist as I possibly can. Two areas that I feel can add to my effectiveness as a teacher are in communicating to my students insights gained through continuing my own work and learning more of the history of watercolor--European, Oriental and American.

Exhibiting in national shows is a goal which I feel can stimulate a painter to keep abreast of what is happening in the field. Not that I think one should try to paint in a style more readily accepted in such shows. However, because of the expense involved and the competitiveness of most national shows, it seems wise to select the shows one submits to quite carefully. In doing this, I think a painter becomes much more aware of what he is trying to do.

Finally, the largest and most nebulous goal for myself is to try to realize as much of my potential as an artist as I possibly can. This I hope to accomplish through a self-imposed program of continuous work and study in my time away from teaching. Then too, if things continue as they have, I may possibly leave teaching to paint full-time when some of my financial responsibilities to my family have eased. At least it is a prospect to look forward to. I think the question always exists in a person's mind as to what one might accomplish if he were free to devote all his working energy to an endeavor. Whatever ones status as an artist, the years pass too quickly and there is so much to do. I would like to conclude this paper by quoting William Thon:

> "It seems to me that painting is largely a matter of the spirit, and that the eyes and hands of the artist and the tools of his trade must be made to obey it." (Gruskin, 1964)

## X. ILLUSTRATIONS

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